

CHANGES IN NON-GOVERNMENTAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN RUSSIA  
AND CHINA SINCE 1991

By

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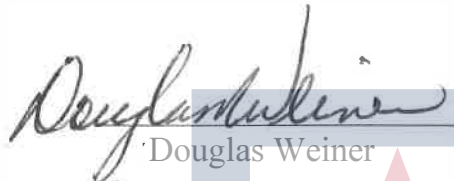
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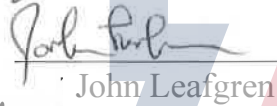
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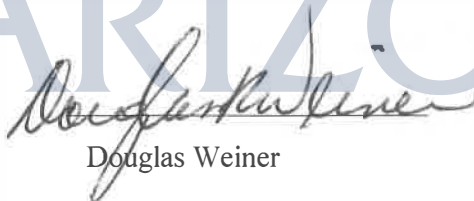
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Jiahao Zhou

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## **Abstract**

Non-governmental exchange refers to people-to-people contact between two or more specific countries. Since 1991, both Russia and China have each experienced “a time of transition” in their political and economic environment, which has led to several critical changes in several aspects of non-governmental exchanges. The content of these changes, along with the trends and problems behind these changes, are studied in the thesis, whose aim is to further our understanding of the relationship between Russia and China.

This thesis can be divided into four parts.

The Introduction briefly introduces the background of the study, listing studies related to the topic and research questions: what are the trends in the history of non-governmental exchanges between Russia and China? Which problems can be observed in the contacts? What is likely to happen in the future?

In Part Two, the content of non-governmental exchanges between Russia and China is discussed in several different aspects, including non-government trade, cultural and educational contacts, and tourism.

In Part Three, three general trends and two major problems of Sino-Russian non-governmental exchanges are presented and analyzed.

In the Conclusion, the whole thesis is recapitulated; on the basis of the study, several predictions about the future relations are made.

**Key Words:** Non-governmental exchanges, Russia, China, economy, cultural contacts, tourism, foreign relations

## **I. Introduction**

### **1. Background of the study**

When I came to Russia in the summer of 2018 for the FIFA World Cup, I was totally surprised by what I saw: there were so many “Chinese elements” in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg. Arriving at Sheremetyevo Airport, I could see instructions written in Chinese; walking around Nevsky Prospect, I was able to see advertisements of many Chinese brands (most of them were technology companies, such as Hisense, Huawei, and Vivo). Besides that, travelers and students from China were everywhere in big cities, while you could even hear Chinese from Russian people sometimes. Noticing these “Chinese elements” in Russia, I soon began to wonder about what might be behind this phenomenon.

Both Russia and China have experienced huge changes since 1991. On one hand, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia totally changed its political, social and economic system, (initially, and nominally) aiming for western-style democracy and free market: according to Riasanovsky, it is an “era of ‘transition.’”<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the word “transition” also can be used to describe the situation in China, where great changes in different dimensions were taking place in China, even if the Communist Party is still in power there.

In order to support these reforms and changes, both countries tried to find partners and friends in foreign affairs. In the beginning, Russia turned to western countries for help and had closer economic relationships with its “traditional”

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<sup>1</sup> Riasanovsky, Nicholas V., and Mark D. Steinberg. *A History of Russia*. 7th ed., London: Oxford University Press, 2005. p. 609.

economic cooperators in Europe, such as Germany and France; while Japan and the United States were two main economic partners of China, despite many political and diplomatic conflicts. With the change of international and domestic situations, the relationship between China and Russia became closer and closer: they built the strategic partnership of cooperation in 1996, while the Sino-Russian Treaty of good neighborly friendship and cooperation was signed in 2001<sup>2</sup>. This process has been accelerating since 2013, when Chinese president Xi came to power. According to his strategic view of diplomatic policy, which is named “One belt one road” (“yidai yilu” in Chinese), Russian is one of the most important diplomatic partners<sup>3</sup>. Some official activities such as high-level exchanges and joint military exercises are conducted. They also cooperate in some global affairs like countering terrorism, ensuring regional stability, and dealing with common threats.

Among all the contacts between Russia and China, non-governmental exchanges, or people-to-people contacts, could be one of the most interesting fields to be researched. What is non-governmental exchange? It can refer to contact between two or more specific countries, involving people or groups that have no direct connection with the government or official backgrounds. It may encompass activities such as trade, cultural exchanges, working, studying and tourism. It could serve a major component of the bilateral relationship, since it could be more flexible and extensive than official contacts.

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<sup>2</sup> “Zhongguo tong eluosi de guanxi 中国同俄罗斯的关系” [Chinese relations with Russia]. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 中华人民共和国外交部, Oct. 2018. Retrieved March 3, 2019. [www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq\\_676201/gj\\_676203/oz\\_678770/1206\\_679110/sbgx\\_679114/](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/oz_678770/1206_679110/sbgx_679114/).

<sup>3</sup> Deepak, et al. *China's Global Rebalancing and the New Silk Road*. Springer Singapore. 2018. p. 5.



Besides that, it would be necessary to understand that even though it is called “non-governmental exchanges”, governments still play critical roles during these contacts. In the book *Nongovernmental Politics*, Michel Feher states that “the border between governmental and nongovernmental politics can be crossed—in both directions,”<sup>4</sup> which suggests that governmental politics, activities, and attitudes could be closely connected to non-governmental activities.

Governments can influence non-governmental exchanges in different ways. Firstly, governmental policies and intergovernmental agreements could largely encourage or discourage some non-governmental activities like studying abroad, bilateral trade, or tourism. Secondly, governments may use some media or “non-governmental” organizations which have official influence or are controlled by the government to achieve goals without presenting themselves----they are still part of “non-governmental” activities, but they are not really “non-governmental”. These could be extremely common in non-governmental exchanges between Russia and China, due to their domestic political environments and systems.

Thus, it might be not possible to discuss non-governmental exchanges without mentioning Chinese and Russian governments; and the topic of how government can influence non-governmental exchanges will be one crucial part of the study.

## **2. Literature review**

There are many solid and well-organized books that discuss Sino-Russian

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<sup>4</sup> Feher, Michel. *Nongovernmental Politics*. New York: Zone Books, 2007. p.12

relations, and among these books the situation and history of non-governmental contact is usually introduced separately. These books may include *A general history of Sino-Russia relations* written by Huang, Dingtian<sup>5</sup>; Yang, Gao, and Feng's *Sino-Russia Relations Over One Hundred years*<sup>6</sup>; *Transformation and Development of Sino-Russia Relations* of Zhang, Xuekun<sup>7</sup>; *Russia and China: Four centuries of interaction* edited by Lukin<sup>8</sup>. There are also many notable works completed in English, which include Quested's *Sino-Russian Relations: A Short History*<sup>9</sup> and Alexander Lukin's *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations since the Eighteenth Century*.<sup>10</sup>

Usually, they contain detailed and important materials which might help people know the big picture of the history. However, when talking about non-governmental exchange, sometimes they discuss the topic not so specifically, since it might not be the most central part of their studies. Besides that, some studies may be a little outdated---since the Sino-Russian relation has developed rapidly in recent years (especially after 2013 when the “one belt, one road” strategic conception was launched, and the Ukrainian Crisis of 2014). Thus, it might be necessary to find the latest materials and recent data in the area.

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<sup>5</sup> Huang, Dingtian 黄定天. *Zhong'e guanxi tongshi 中俄关系通史 [A general history of Sino-Russia relations]*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Yang, Chuang 杨闯, et al. *Bainian zhong'e guanxi 百年中俄关系 [Sino-Russia relations over one-hundred years]*. Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe 世界知识出版社, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Zhang, Xuekun 张学昆. *Zhong'e guanxi de yanbian he fazhan 中俄关系的演变和发展 [Transformation and Development of Sino-Russia Relations]*. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Лукин, А.В. *Россия и Китай: четыре века взаимодействия (Russia and China: Four-centuries of interactions)*. Moscow: Издательство «Весь Мир». 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Quested, R. K. I. *Sino-Russian Relations: A Short History*. Routledge, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Lukin, Alexander. *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations since the Eighteenth Century*. M.E. Sharpe, 2003.

Besides these books which discuss general topics of Sino-Russian relations, many studies which focus on Sino-Russian relations in specific domains have been published. Miyeon Oh studies the strategic energy ties between Russia and China in article “Sino-Russian Strategic Energy Ties Enduring Partnership or Fragile Bonds?”<sup>11</sup>. Paul Bolt discusses the recent Sino-Russian strategic partnership in “Sino-Russian Relations in a Changing World Order.”<sup>12</sup> Huang Xi, on the other hand, researches the current situation of Sino-Russian youth exchanges in her thesis “Discussion about the situation and prospect of Sino-Russian youth exchanges of the new century.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, Sheng’s “the new situation in Sino-Russian tourist cooperation”<sup>14</sup>, Zhou and Wang’s “Research about Sino-Russian economic cooperative development against the background of ‘One belt one road’”<sup>15</sup>, Liu’s “A study about current Sino-Russian folk contacts”<sup>16</sup>, and Yankov’s “Sinophobia-Russophobia: the realities and illusions”<sup>17</sup> also need to be recognized.

Generally, these journal articles or theses are relatively new, and they can introduce and analyze one specific field systematically and in detail, which can be

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<sup>11</sup> Oh, Miyeon. *Sino-Russian Strategic Energy Ties: Enduring Partnership or Fragile Bonds?* Atlantic Council, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Bolt, Paul. “Sino-Russian Relations in a Changing World Order.” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2014, pp. 47-69. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/26270816](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26270816).

<sup>13</sup> Huang, Xi 黄茜. *Shilun xinshiji zhong'e qingnian jiaoliu de xianzhuang he qianjing 试论新世纪中俄青年交流的现状和前景* [Discussion about the situation and prospect of Sino-Russian youth exchanges of new century]. 2018. China Foreign Affairs University, MA Thesis.

<sup>14</sup> Sheng, Haiyan 盛海燕. “Zhong'e lvyou hezuo xinzhuang qianxi 中俄旅游合作现状浅析 [Analyze of current situation of Sino-Russian tourist cooperation].” *Xiandai Jiaoji 现代交际*, no.22, 2018, pp. 106-107.

<sup>15</sup> Zhou, Qinyu 周琴宇, and Wang, Yunfeng 王云凤. “Yidai yilu jianshe beijing xia zhong'e jingmao hezuo fazhan yanjiu ‘一带一路’建设背景下中俄经贸合作发展研究 [Research about Sino-Russian economic cooperative development against the background of ‘One belt one road’].” *Jingji Zongheng 经济纵横*, no.25, pp.106-107, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Liu, Cunhai 刘存海. *Dangdai zhong'e minjian jiaowang shulun 当代中俄民间交往述论* [A study about current Sino-Russian folk contacts]. 2011. Shandong University, MA Thesis.

<sup>17</sup> Янков, Алексей. “Синофобия - Русофобия: Реальность и Иллюзии (Sinophobia-Russophobia: the reality and illusions).” *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniia*, no. 3, 2010, pp. 65-71.

important and inspirational for scholars who might be interested in the latest situation of Sino-Russian relations and non-governmental exchanges.

### **3. Thesis statement**

Thus, based on former studies, documents, the latest news and findings, it might be possible to conduct a systematic, detailed, and newer research about the history and current situation of non-governmental exchanges between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. In this research, following questions are posed and discussed:

Firstly, by observing the history and current situation of non-governmental exchanges between Russia and China, which trends can be found? How significant could they be?

Secondly, which problems could both countries have in the process of developing non-governmental relations?

Lastly, on the basis of all the trends and factors discussed above, what is the future of non-governmental exchanges between Russia and China likely to be? How can they influence the general Sino-Russian relations?

This thesis will suggest answers to these questions.

## II. Content of non-governmental exchanges between Russia and China

### 1. Non-governmental economic and trading exchanges

Non-governmental economic and trading exchanges are one important part and basis of non-governmental exchanges. Through non-governmental trade, economic development and people's living qualities can be elevated. At the same time, it can also create opportunities for people from different countries to know more about each other's culture.

After the dissolution of USSR in 1991, both Russia and China desired to find a path towards free-marketing and new ways of economic development. Thus, only one year after the independence of the Russian Federation, Russian president Boris Yeltsin visited China and issued *the Joint Statement on the Basis of Mutual Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation*.<sup>18</sup> In the statement, new economic cooperative forms were mentioned and encouraged; besides that, both countries agreed that they should create convenient opportunities for unofficial commercial and personal exchanges.<sup>19</sup>

After the declaration, millions of Chinese people came to Russia, seeking business opportunities and wealth: the total value of trade increased from 3.9 billion dollars in 1991 to 5.86 billion dollars in 1992<sup>20</sup>. In 1993, it even reached 7.68 billion

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<sup>18</sup> "China and Russia: Partnership of Strategic Coordination."

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China. Retrieved March 3, 2019.  
[www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/ziliao\\_665539/3602\\_665543/3604\\_665547/t18028.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18028.shtml).

<sup>19</sup> "Guanyu zhong'e guanxi jichu de lianhe shengming 关于中俄关系基础的联合声明[The Joint Statement on the Basis of Mutual Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation]." CCTV (China Central Television): *Subject of Putin's visit China*. Retrieved March 3, 2019.  
<http://www.cctv.com/special/903/6/70491.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Huang, Dingtian 黄定天. *Zhong'e guanxi tongshi 中俄关系通史 [A general history of Sino-Russia relations]*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社, 2013. p.267.

dollars, which was also a significant increase. Besides official support and agreements, there were also several critical reasons and motivations for this sharp increase: due to the unbalanced economic development patterns in the Soviet era, the shortage of agricultural and light industrial products was a big problem at that time; on the other hand, Chinese individual business also was eager to find a new market. In addition, China and Russia are geographically close, which makes it easy and cheap to travel across the border. Russian visa policies at that time were also relatively loose, which enabled foreigners to travel in Russia easily.

Thus, a special group of individual businessmen emerged. They were called “profiteers” (or “Dao Ye” in Chinese). According to their memoirs, usually, they would buy cheap light industrial products (like clothes and shoes) and food (such as candies) in China and take the train from Beijing to Moscow. When the train entered Russia, they would sell their products to Russians in one station after another at a very high price. They also would buy Russian products (typically, they were military products or fur) on the way back and sell them in China.<sup>21</sup> In the process, they could earn enormous profits due to the differences of product prices in Russia and China. Besides these individual “profiteers”, different scales of Russian and Chinese import-and-export companies, along with the export of Chinese labor services, contributed much to development.

Generally, after the dissolution of USSR, Sino-Russian non-governmental trade

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<sup>21</sup> Nie, Zuoping 聂作平. “Zaoqi ‘daoye’: huashang de mosike taojin zhilv 早期‘倒爷’: 华商的莫斯科淘金之旅 ‘Daoye’ in early times: Chinese businessmen’s gold-seeking trips to Moscow.” Gonghui Bolan 工会博览. No.8, 2008. p.61-62.

alleviated the shortage of agricultural and light industrial products in Russia. Russian products and raw materials also were important for the industrial development of China at that time. However, this massive but nonstandard trading development also created several serious problems, which then caused crises in non-governmental trade.

Firstly, the economic and political environment of Russia was chaotic and unfriendly to foreigners, which, together with the activity of gangs, violated the legal rights and security of Chinese people and companies: local Russian officials and police usually asked for bribes from Chinese businessmen and they did little to prevent business people from being robbed. Secondly, many products sold to Russia, like down jackets and shoes, were pinchbeck and low-quality, which made Russians hostile to Chinese and Chinese products. Finally, the Russian government also set high tariffs on imported products----it also took several initiatives to eliminate tax avoidance between 1998 to 2000. As a result, the total amounts of Sino-Russian trade stopped increasing from 1994 to 1999. The economic crisis and the collapse of ruble in 1998 also made the bad worse.

The situation of stagnation was broken in the 21st century, when both countries made efforts to stimulate bilateral trade. China, after joining the WTO in 2001, focused on changing its ways of producing and trading: raising the quality of products, regulating and simplifying of the trading process, and enhancing the reputation of “made in China” became the primary goal of development; Russia, on the other hand, devoted itself to curbing corruption and optimizing the economic environment in Putin’s presidency. In order to improve the trading and investing

environment, both countries organized talks to solve several critical problems in the bilateral trade like “grey custom clearance”<sup>22</sup> and securing legal rights for Chinese companies operating in Russia in 2002 and 2004<sup>23</sup>.

These efforts, along with the economic development and stabilization in both countries, created new opportunities for further increasing non-governmental trade: from 1999 to 2008, the total value of bilateral trade increased by 30% each year and reached 56.8 billion dollars in 2008.<sup>24</sup> Although both countries suffered from the global economic crisis in 2008, they finally overcame the difficulties and found some new areas of commercial interchange.

One of the most significant growth points comes with the development of technology and the internet. Mechanical and electrical products, along with high technology products (like Chinese mobile phones) have become the main products that China exports to Russia since 2010.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, cross-border electronic commerce also is developing rapidly in Russia. Chinese electronic commercial websites like “Aliexpress” (the global online shopping platform of “Alibaba Group”) entered Russia and achieved success:

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<sup>22</sup> The ways of custom clearance commonly used by Chinese companies in Russia in 1990s, when the Russian government allowed custom clearance companies to become the agency for foreign companies. These companies cooperated with local officials, helping foreign companies avoided high customs duties.

<sup>23</sup> Yue, Songdong 岳颂东. “Dui zhong’e minjian maoyi zhixu guifanhua de sikao 对中俄民间贸易秩序规范化的思考[Reflection on the normalization of Sino-Russian non-governmental trading orders].” *E’luosi Zhongya Dongou Shichang 俄罗斯中亚东欧市场*. No.11, 2004., p.32.

<sup>24</sup> “2020 nian zhong’e jingmao hezuo jiankuang 2010 年中俄经贸合作简况 [The brief situation of Sino-Russian economic cooperation in 2010].”

*Office of counsel about trading-economic problems of Chinese embassy in Russian Federation*, March. 20. 2011. Retrieved March 5, 2019. <http://ru.mofcom.gov.cn/article/zxhz/201103/20110307456253.shtml>.

<sup>25</sup> Zhou, Qinyu 周琴宇, and Wang, Yunfeng 王云凤. “Yidai yilu jianshe beijing xia zhong’e jingmao hezuo fazhan yanjiu ‘一带一路’建设背景下中俄经贸合作发展研究 [Research about Sino-Russian economic cooperative development against the background of ‘One belt one road’].” *Jingji Zongheng 经济纵横*, no.25, pp.106-107, 2018. p.106



“Aliexpress” had 22 million Russian users in 2017 and the number is still increasing.

To cooperate with the development of online shopping, Chinese logistics enterprises also actively entered the Russian domestic market under the policy of “one belt one road”, which could bring inexpensive but efficient logistic service to Russia.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, with development of the general economy, Chinese people have higher demands for high-quality agricultural products. Thus, one could observe that there are more and more Russian agricultural products like juice and dairy products in Chinese markets. According to official data, from 2017 to 2018 the trade in agricultural products increased by 30%, which is an incredibly significant number.<sup>27</sup>

With these new growth points, the total value of Sino-Russian trade kept increasing and achieved 100 billion dollars by the end of 2018.<sup>28</sup>

Another critical issue among bilateral economic exchanges is investment. It is always considered to be the weak point of Sino-Russian economic communication: in 2002, the total value of Chinese direct investment in Russia was only 0.2 billion dollars----by contrast, German investment in Russia was 8.1 billion dollars and American investment was 5.52 billion dollars in the same year. However, recently, Chinese enterprises have tended to invest overseas to seek new opportunities. Russia could be one important market since it has numerous natural resources and the

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<sup>26</sup> Zhou, Qinyu, and Wang, yunfeng, p.106

<sup>27</sup> “Zhong’e maoyi’e tupo 1000 yi meiyuan, chuang lishi xingao 中俄贸易额突破 1000 亿美元，创历史新高 [The total value of Sino-Russian trade is more than 100 billion US dollars in 2018, which an all-time high record].” *Central Government of People’s Republic of China*. Jan. 10. 2019. Retrieved March 5, 2019. [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-01/10/content\\_5356799.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-01/10/content_5356799.htm).

<sup>28</sup> “The total value of Sino-Russian trade is more than 100 billion US dollars in 2018, which is an all-time high record”, [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-01/10/content\\_5356799.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-01/10/content_5356799.htm).

political environment also is friendly to Chinese companies; at the same, the sanctions imposed by western countries might give Chinese companies more opportunities and room to develop in Russia. Therefore, the value of Chinese investment to Russia has rapidly increased recently: according to China's Ministry of Commerce, in 2017, the value of Chinese direct investment to Russia reached 2.22 billion dollars, an increase of 72%; and the value of newly signed engineering contracts reached 7.75 billion dollars.<sup>29</sup> Although these numbers may not be as significant as German investment in Russia or Japanese investment in China, the speed of increase could be incredible, which might show that even this field, which is generally considered to be the weak spot in Sino-Russian trading exchanges, has a bright future.

To summarize, the non-governmental economic and trading exchanges between Russia and China experienced four stages.

Stage I is from 1991 to 1993, which is the period of explosive development. After the dissolution of USSR, bilateral trade developed explosively but primitively. Millions of Chinese products entered Russia by different means, which slightly alleviated the shortage of agricultural and light industrial products in Russia at that time. However, this pattern of development also created several serious problems.

Stage II is from 1994 to 2000, which is the period of stagnation. At that time, the general bilateral trading and economic stopped developing due to various reasons.

Stage III is from 2000 to 2008, which is the period of re-acceleration. Because of

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<sup>29</sup> "Zhong'guo Shangwubu: 2017 nian zhong'guo dui'e zhijie touzi 22.2 yi meiyuan, tonbi zengzhang 72% 中国商务部: 2017 年中国对俄直接投资 22.2 亿美元 同比增长 72% [China's Ministry of Commerce, in 2017, the value of Chinese direct investment in Russia reached 2.22 billion dollars, an increase of 72%] *Sputnik News*. April. 27. 2018. Retrieved May 7, 2019. <http://sputniknews.cn/economics/201804271025265040/>

governments' efforts and the stability of political and economic environment, the value of Sino-Russian trades kept quickly increasing.

Stage IV is from 2009 to 2019, which is the period of adjustment and new opportunities. Although Russia and China both suffered from the economic crisis in 2008, they finally succeeded in finding new growth points (like high-technology and agricultural products). As a result, both bilateral trade and investment developed quickly and reached a historical peak.

## **2. Educational and other cultural contacts**

Culture is a broad concept which can be hard to give an exact definition to. In following chapters, “cultural contacts” mainly mean the contact and cooperation between Russia and China in the field of education (like foreign students and academic exchanges), media, literature, and arts (such as films, theatrical performance, and music), because they are significant in the content of Sino-Russian cultural contacts.

### **2.1 Educational contacts**

Educational contacts can be critical and important, because they have multiple advantages to both countries. Firstly, they can bring a series of economic benefits and human resources in such fields; Secondly, students can use advanced educational resources to improve themselves, so that they may contribute to their home country. Besides that, they could be the bridge of cultural communication: through them,

different cultures can be communicated and understood.

The history of educational contacts between Russia and China goes back to 1950s, when the recently established People's Republic of China sent elites and intelligentsia to the Soviet Union in order to learn from the "big brother". However, this process was interrupted because of the Sino-Soviet split.

After the dissolution of USSR, Russia faced several serious problems in the field of science and education<sup>30</sup>, which made it hard to attract foreign students. Perhaps a more critical problem was that Chinese educational institutes and companies did not recognize diplomas from Russian higher educational institutes; this could make studying in Russia not worthwhile (the situation could be the same for Russians studying in China).

Thus, to solve this problem, Russia and China signed an agreement about mutual recognition of diploma and certificates in 1995, which, to a great extent, stimulated the activity of studying abroad in Russia or China.<sup>31</sup> In 1997, only 557 Russian students studied in China; but in 2015, 28 thousand Chinese students studied in Russia, while 16 thousand Russian students came to China for education. In 2020, the total number (Chinese exchange students in China plus Russian exchange students in China) will be targeted to be as much as 100 thousand, according to the Ministry of Education in China.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Service, Robert. *A History of Modern Russia from Tsarism to the Twenty-First Century*. 3rd ed., Harvard University Press, 2009. p. 544

<sup>31</sup> Huang, Dingtian, p.270

<sup>32</sup> "Zhong'e Jiaoyu hezuo shenru, shuangfang liuxuesheng chaoguo 7 wan ren 中俄教育合作深入 双方留学生超过 7 万人 [The cooperation of Sino-Russian are becoming further, and there are more than 70 thousand Russian and Chinese students are studying in each other's country.]" *Sina News*. Retrieved March 6, 2019. [http://k.sina.com.cn/article\\_1644855075\\_620a7f23020002uyz.html](http://k.sina.com.cn/article_1644855075_620a7f23020002uyz.html).

To Chinese students, studying in Russia is a more and more popular option of studying abroad. Firstly, Russia has high-quality higher educational resources in particular areas like military industry, natural resources management (such as Petroleum Engineering), aerospace, classical music, and fine arts---some might be even better than in western developed countries.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, most Russian higher educational institutes provide complete language and bridging courses to foreign students to help students prepare for formal curriculum. Lastly, the requirement and cost of studying in Russia is generally not as high as studying in developed countries, such as the United States and Australia, especially after the decline of Russian ruble from 2014.

On the other hand, in Russia, more and more people tend to study Chinese as their first or second foreign language: in 1997, only 5000 Russians were studying Chinese, while in 2017, the number was 56 thousand. In 2019, Chinese language even was one of the subjects in the Unified State Exam (ЕГЭ).<sup>34</sup> By studying the language, it could be expected that these people would know more about Chinese culture and play more critical roles in the process of cultural or economic contacts.

However, despite the achievement of educational contacts and cooperation, there remain some weaknesses or problems in the field. Firstly, China or Russia might not be the most popular destination for studying abroad for Russians or Chinese,

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<sup>33</sup> Dai, Yongjie 代永杰. *Zai'e Guojisheng de xueyi shiying xianzhuang jiqi yingxiang yinsu yanjiu* 在俄国际生的学业适应现状及其影响因素研究 [A research about current situation of international students' adaption in Russia, and factors which can affect it]. 2017. Northeast China Normal University, MA Thesis. p.3-4.

<sup>34</sup> "E'zhongxuesheng 2019 nian jiang shouci tongguo guojia tongyi kaoshi hanyu kemukaoshi 俄中学生 2019 年将首次通过国家统一考试汉语科目考试 [Russian middle school students will take part in Chinese test of Unified State Exam in 2019]." *Sputnik News*. Nov. 27. 2018. Retrieved March 6, 2019. [http://sputniknews.cn/russia\\_china\\_relations/201811271026950898/](http://sputniknews.cn/russia_china_relations/201811271026950898/)

respectively: according to the survey conducted by a overseas education agency, about 75% of Chinese students chose the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, and Australia as their destinations of studying abroad in 2017;<sup>35</sup> at the same time, Russian students also tend to study in western countries like France and Germany.<sup>36</sup> In addition, it also might be hard for Chinese students to understand Russian in major courses in one to two years, since most of Chinese students may not have studied Russian before they come to Russia and the language courses provided by Russia also might not be perfect for all Chinese students.

To summarize, after 1995 when the agreement about mutual recognition of diploma and certificates was signed, huge progress was made in the field of educational contacts: more and more Chinese students are interested in studying in Russia, while Russian people are willing to learn Chinese as their second foreign language. However, compared with other popular destinations for studying abroad like the United States or Germany, or other popular foreign languages like English, both countries need to put more efforts.

Recently, there seems to be a new noticeable trend in the field of educational contact, which is that of increasing cooperation between Russian and Chinese higher educational institutes. According to Lyudmila Ogorodova, the deputy minister of education and science, more than 150 Russian higher educational institutions had built

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<sup>35</sup> "2017-2018 niandu liuxue baipishu 2017-2018 年度留学白皮书 [White Paper of studying abroad in 2017 and 2018]."

*JJL Overseas Association*. Retrieved March 6, 2019. [https://www.jjl.cn/zt/2017/20171201\\_baipi/index.html](https://www.jjl.cn/zt/2017/20171201_baipi/index.html)

<sup>36</sup> Конюхова, Ксения. "Утечка мозгов: Почему российские абитуриенты все чаще уезжают учиться в зарубежные вузы [Brain drain: Why Russian students are increasingly leaving to study in foreign universities]?" *Комсомольская Правда*. July. 2. 2017. Retrieved March 7, 2019. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26699.5/3723722/>

cooperative relations with about 600 Chinese institutions by the end of 2017.<sup>37</sup>

Besides that, in 2014, Moscow State University worked together with Beijing Institute of Technology, creating Shenzhen MSU-BIT University (Университет МГУ-ППИ в Шэньчжэне). More than 50% of professors of the union university are from Moscow State University and students are required to take lessons in Chinese, English, and Russian. After graduating, they can have degrees from both the union university and Moscow State University, which might be helpful for them to develop their careers in China, Russia, and Central Asian countries.

## 2.2 Other cultural contacts

Both Russia and China have a long history and rich cultural traditions. Besides that, they also share common historical memories about communism: in the 1950s, China introduced Soviet movies, songs, and literary works, which could be a good basis for further cultural contacts. After the independence of the Russian Federation, both Russian and Chinese leaders agreed to expand the cooperation in the field of culture, arts, education, information, tourism, and sports.<sup>38</sup> Several years after the statement, the most significant form of cultural exchange was the visits of Russian or Chinese artistic groups: famous Russian artistic groups like Alexander Ensemble, the Kremlin Ballet, and Moiseyev dancing company visited China; while Chinese

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<sup>37</sup> “Как развивается российско-китайское сотрудничество в сфере образования: интервью с Людмилой Огородовой [Development of the Sino-Russian cooperation in education: an interview with Lyudmila Ogorodova]”

*Новости Сибирской Науки*. Dec. 21. 2017. Retrieved March 7, 2019.

<http://www.sib-science.info/ru/heis/kak-razvivaetsya-rossiysko-kitayskoe-20122017>.

<sup>38</sup> “The Joint Statement on the Basis of Mutual Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation”, <http://www.cctv.com/special/903/6/70491.html>

National Oriental Song and Dance Ensemble, and the military ensemble came to Russia for performance.<sup>39</sup>

Another important form of cultural contact included activities in “years of culture”:

2006 was the “year of Russian culture” in China, when 22 Russian artistic groups came to China for artistic programs and more than 300 million watched these performances on television.<sup>40</sup> Besides performances, exhibitions of Russian arts also were organized in 13 Chinese museums, which attracted about one million visitors.<sup>41</sup> The next year was “the year of China” in Russia. In return, Chinese artistic groups visited Russia and several Chinese art exhibitions were held in Russia.

When we get to the 2010s, both countries recognized the importance of the internet and new media. Thus, 2016 and 2017 were announced to be the years of “the communication of Sino-Russian media.” President Putin attended the opening ceremony and was interviewed by the Xinhua News Agency.<sup>42</sup> In these two years, Chinese and Russian media workers worked together, discovering new ways to spread information and cultural programs. As the result of their efforts, “Sino-Russian headline” (中俄头条/Россия-Китай: главное), a bilingual mobile phone application created by China Radio International and Rossiya Sevodnya, was open to public for download in Russia and China. China Radio International and Rossiya Sevodnya

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<sup>39</sup> Huang, Dingtian, p.267

<sup>40</sup> Cui, Yunhua 崔云华. *Zhong'e wenhua jiaoliu yanjiu 中俄文化交流问题研究 [A study of problems in Sino-Russian cultural communication]*.2011. Heilongjiang University. MA Thesis. p. 16

<sup>41</sup> Cui, Yunhua, p. 16

<sup>42</sup> “Zhong'e meiti jiaoliu nian 中俄媒体交流年 [Year of Sino-Russian media-communication].” *Embassy of People's Republic of China in Russian Federation*. Jan. 26. 2018. Retrieved March 8, 2019. <http://ru.china-embassy.org/chn/ztbd/zemtjln/t1529153.html>



might want to integrate resources of social media in China and Russia (like Wechat or VK), making it the flagship platform of information and service exchanges. By the end of January 2018, more than 4 million users from both countries downloaded this application.<sup>43</sup>

However, it could be observed that most of these activities of cultural contacts have an official background, which means that the extent of enthusiasm and motivation of “real” non-governmental cultural exchanges might not be as satisfactory as people may expect.

In addition, some Russian and Chinese cultural products (like films and books) might not be so popular in each other’s country. For example, from 1997 to 2005, 47 Chinese (and Hong Kong) films were introduced in Russian theatres, and their total revenue of box office was just 17.6 million dollars.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, the box office revenues of the Chinese film *Wandering Earth* reached 5.8 million dollars in the United States<sup>45</sup> (and this film was just shown in a small number of film theatres in the United States); while that of the American film *Battle Angel: Alita* had already exceeded 113 million dollars by May 3 2019.<sup>46</sup> Other excellent Russian films or TV dramas like “Icebreaker”, “Leviathan”, also are not widely known by Chinese ordinary people.

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<sup>43</sup> “Year of Sino-Russian media-communication”, <http://ru.china-embassy.org/chn/ztbd/zemtjln/t1529153.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> “Китайские фильмы не пользуются успехом в России, но их прокат «возрождает» Минкульт [Chinese films are not popular in Russia, but their rental “revives” the Ministry of culture].” *Кинодана*. May. 30. 2015. Retrieved March 7, 2019.

<http://kinodata.pro/vse-o-kino/obzor-kassovyh-sborov-v-rossii/7371-kitayskie-filmy-ne-polzuyutsya-uspehom-v-rossii-no-ih-prokat-vozrozhdaet-minkult.html>

<sup>45</sup> “The Wandering Earth”. *Box office Mojo*. Retrieved March 3, 2019.

<https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=main&id=thewanderingearth.html>.

<sup>46</sup> “Alita: Battle Angel.” *Box office Mojo*. Retrieved March 3, 2019.

<https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=main&id=alita.html>.

### 3. Tourism and personal contacts

Tourism is always a vital part of person-to-person contact. Both Russia and China have rich and colorful tourism resources, which include natural attractions and human landscapes. Through traveling and visiting, the local economy can be developed and friendship among people can be strengthened. Thus, tourism is always one priority for both countries to develop and explore.

#### 3.1 The first peak and trough

The first wave of travel between Russia and China occurred from 1992 to 1994, when the border control of both countries was relatively loose. According to the data, there were 836,000 trips by Russians to China, while there were 751,000 trips by Chinese to Russia.<sup>47</sup> However, many of these people traveled for “business” and trade (just like discussed above); only a few of them were for discovering attractions and vacation. Therefore, with the change of visa policy of Russia and ebb of profiteer trade in 1994, tourism between Russia and China began to decline.

To “rescue” the tourist industry and encourage more visitors, Russian and Chinese governments began to take action: they signed an agreement on visa-free group travel, which enables visitors traveling in groups to enter Russia or China without a visa.<sup>48</sup> Following this agreement, more visa-convenient policies were

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<sup>47</sup> Kong, hangbing 孔寒冰, Guan Guihai 关贵海. *Yeliqin zhizheng niandai 叶利钦执政年代* [Years when Yeltsin was in authority]. *Henan: Henan wenyi chubanshe 河南文艺出版社*, 2000. p. 392.

<sup>48</sup> “Безвизовый туристический обмен [Visa-free tourist exchange].” *World Without Borders*. 2018. Retrieved March 10, 2019.

published and, at present, it is relatively easy and fast to apply for a visa to Russia, compared to an American or European visa. As a result, the number of tourists kept increasing again after 2000.

### **3.2 Russian tourists in China**

According to the data provided by Russian Department of Tourism, in 2005, 1.15 million Russian visitors arrived in China; and in 2008, the number was 2.059 million. However, after 2008, the fluctuations in numbers has been extremely great. For example, in 2009, only about 1 million Russians visited China for tourism due to the global economic crisis. Although the number rose again in 2010 (from 0.999 million in 2009 to 1.44 million in 2010), it declined again in 2014, when sanctions heavily affected the exchange rate of the Russian ruble and the general economic situation in Russia (only 1.284 million Russians visited China in 2015). However, recently, it began to increase again and even reached 2.03 million in 2017<sup>49</sup>; some unfriendly policies of western countries (such as the deterioration of Russian-Turkish relations in 2015-2016 and the “closure” of the US Consulate in 2017) might push Russian tourists to choose China as their tourist destination.

To Russians, the most common way of traveling is short trips, which is usually less than 3 days. The most popular tourist destinations are big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou. Besides that, Northeast cities like Harbin and Shenyang also

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<http://visit-russia.ru/our-projects/bezvizovyy-turisticheskiy-obmen>

<sup>49</sup> “Российский статистический ежегодник [Russian statistical yearbook].”

*Federal Services of State Statistics*. 2018. Retrieved March 10, 2019.

[http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat\\_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc\\_1135087342078](http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc_1135087342078)

attract many Russians every year because they are close to the Russian border.

Generally, they like buying Chinese products and experiencing different cultures.

Some Chinese cities with famous historical heritages like Xi'an, Luoyang and

Hangzhou also attract some Russian individuals and travelling groups every year.<sup>50</sup>

### 3.3 Chinese tourists in Russia

The situation could be slightly different among Chinese visitors. In fact, the number of Chinese visitors is increasing every year: from 0.69 million in 2002, 0.718 million in 2009, to 1.478 million in 2017<sup>51</sup>. 2018 could be another milestone: according to the Russian tourist organization “World without border”, during the period of World Cup 2018, 228,000 Chinese visited Russia;<sup>52</sup> and in the Chinese Golden Week (generally from Oct.1 to Oct.7), which is a 7-day Chinese National-Day holiday, about 500 Chinese tourist groups and more than 15,500 Chinese people visited Russia (the number of 2017 is about 11,500).<sup>53</sup> It might show that Russia is more and more popular among tourist destinations for Chinese visitors and the extent of the increase is extremely surprising and noticeable.

This significant increase has moved Russian tourist associations to improve the

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<sup>50</sup> Lena, Magradze. *E'luosi laihua lvyou shichang kaifa yanjiu 俄罗斯来华旅游市场研究 [A study of the market of Russian visitors' coming to China]*. 2018. Shandong University, MA Thesis. p. 19

<sup>51</sup> Российский статистический ежегодник (Russian statistical yearbook).

[http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat\\_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc\\_1135087342078](http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc_1135087342078)

<sup>52</sup> “Eluosi lianbang lvyoushu: 2018 nian shijiebei zuqiusai qingkuang zongjie 俄罗斯联邦旅游署: 2018 年世界杯足球赛情况总结 [Russian Federal Agency of Tourism: The summary on 2018 FIFA World Cup].” *World Without Borders*. 2018. Retrieved March 10, 2019.

<https://cn.visit-russia.ru/news/e-luo-si-lian-bang-lu-you-shu-2018nian-shi-jie-bei-zu-qiu-sai-qing-kuang-zong-jie>

<sup>53</sup> “Shiyi huangjinzhou, eluosi lvyou youyouyou huoqilaile 十一黄金周, 俄罗斯旅游又又焱火起来了 [In Chinese National Holiday, Russian Tourism became hot again].”

*World Without Borders*. 2018. Retrieved March 10, 2019.

<https://cn.visit-russia.ru/news/shi-yi-huang-jin-zhou-e-luo-si-lu-you-you-you-ruo-huo-qi-lai-liao>

travelling experiences of Chinese visitors. One of their initiatives is the program of “China friendly”. Launched in 2014, it covered “tourism service enterprises, such as hotels, restaurants, museums, entertainment centers, as well as companies providing tourist and excursion services”<sup>54</sup>, trying to improve the quality of services and eliminate the barrier of language and culture. Therefore, we may observe Chinese signs or services in both public facilities (like railway stations and airports) and some private facilities (like restaurants and hotels). With the passage of time, it can be predicted that more Chinese-friendly features will be observed in Russian cities and tourist attractions, which might not only make it convenient for Chinese people to visit Russia, but also enable them to gain a deeper understanding of Russian culture.

Possibly, another important tourist innovation is the program of “Red Route”. It is an 8-day thematic group tour focused on Russian communism and revolutionary history---travelers are organized to follow the path of Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks, visiting four Russian cities: Moscow (the capital of the Soviet Russia), Ulyanovsk (Lenin’s birthplace), Kazan (the place where Lenin went to university), and Saint-Petersburg (the city where Lenin led the October Revolution). During the trip, attractions and knowledge related to Lenin, communism, and revolution are introduced.<sup>55</sup> Since there are many elderly people in China who have interest in the Soviet past, “Red Route” could expect to achieve success with that group.

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<sup>54</sup> “Program China Friendly.” *World Without Borders*. 2018. Retrieved March 10, 2019. <http://visit-russia.ru/our-projects/programma-china-friendly>.

<sup>55</sup> “Красный маршрут [Red Route].” *World Without Borders*. 2018. Retrieved March 10, 2019. <http://visit-russia.ru/rossiysko-kitayskiy-turizm/krasnyy-marshrut>.

Aside from these efforts that Russians have made to attract Chinese tourists, Chinese visitors also began to discover the immense Russian land by themselves: Generally, Moscow and Saint-Petersburg are two cities where most Chinese visitors and groups choose to go because they are the centers of Russian culture and history; however, recently, more Chinese have decided to go to the Russian “wilderness”: in 2017, 138,000 Chinese visited Irkutsk for the beautiful view of Baikal (and the number of Chinese visitors was 63% of all foreign visitors in that area); among all foreigners who came to the Russian Arctic National Park, China also contributed the most visitors, despite the fact it is quite costly.<sup>56</sup> Other increasing destinations include the Republic of Yakutia and Crimea. It shows that Chinese visitors are becoming more and more critical to the whole tourist industry of Russia; at the same time, their potential and capacity for consumption also cannot be ignored. It may be the reason why more and more local governments are trying to be enrolled in the program of “China Friendly” and are striving to attract more tourists from China.<sup>57</sup>

### 3.4 Summary

In general, tourism is one important path for non-governmental exchanges between Russia and China; and both governments and tourist associations have been making efforts to attract tourists since the beginning of the 21th century. The

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<sup>56</sup> Sheng, Haiyan 盛海燕. “Zhong’e lvyou hezuo xinzhuang qianxi 中俄旅游合作现状浅析 [Analyze of current situation of Sino-Russian tourist cooperation].” *Xiandai Jiaoji 现代交际*, no.22, 2018, pp. 106-107. p. 106.

<sup>57</sup> “2019 nian yakute jiang xiyin zhongguo youke zuowei gongzuo zhongdian fangxiang 2019 年俄雅库特将吸引中国游客作为工作重点方向 [In 2019, the republic of Yakutia will focus on attracting Chinese tourists].” *Sputnik News*. Jan. 16. 2019. Retrieved March 11, 2019. <http://sputniknews.cn/economics/201901161027371651/>

achievement could be significant since the general number of tourists is increasing recently.

However, behind the prosperity, there are also many problems and weakness. For example, many Russians complain about some bad habits of Chinese tourists, such as talking loudly and defecation in public areas;<sup>58</sup> while in China, there might be not enough qualified tour guides who could speak Russian outside the province of Heilongjiang.

These problems might not be easy to solve since they might be closely related to long-term activities like education. Nonetheless, tourism can be one of the most successful and potential parts among all the content of Sino-Russian non-governmental exchanges.

#### **4. A brief summary of the content of Sino-Russian non-governmental exchanges**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union was a sudden but important event in the 1990s, and both Russia and China might not have been fully ready for the sudden change: Russia was eager to discover paths toward a free market and China was attempting to get along with this “familiar stranger”. Thus, it can be observed that in the beginning, the modalities of non-governmental contacts were hot but chaotic, since both countries could see huge benefits from exchanges but necessary orders and policies were lacking.

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<sup>58</sup> Елена Роткевич. “Почему китайские туристы плохо ведут себя в России. [Why Chinese tourists behave badly in Russia]?”  
*Город 812*. Feb. 16. 2018. Retrieved March 11, 2019.  
<http://gorod-812.ru/pochemu-kitayskie-turisty-ploho-vedut-v-rossii/>

Then, due to problems of “the first contact”, enthusiasm began to subside and the development of non-governmental exchanges declined. Suffering from the 1998 economic crisis and feeling disappointed by western countries, Russia gradually turned its diplomatic focus to the east; while China also was making efforts to promote its economic reform and counterbalance western countries (the “May 8” event<sup>59</sup> and US arms sale to Taiwan from 1997-2000 disappointed China’s leaders and people). Thus, Russia and China quickly drew close. Led by agreements and encouragement of governments, non-governmental exchanges, including bilateral trade, cultural, and tourist contacts, also recovered and developed. Therefore, it might be evident to conclude that in that period of time, the Russian and Chinese governments played critical roles in the process of stimulating different kinds of contacts.

However, even governments cannot control everything; both Russians and Chinese found that there are many fields where they can cooperate: natural resources, market exploitation, education, science, tourism...etc. These factors, along with the development of both countries, gradually became the motivation and brace of Sino-Russian non-governmental exchanges. Especially after the Ukrainian and Crimean crisis, when western influence partly abated in Russia, Chinese investment and influence, with the encouragement of “one belt, one road” filled that vacuum rapidly, becoming one of the most important new increasing inputs for Russia. Although Russia might not be the biggest economic partner of China, and western cultures still

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<sup>59</sup> It refers to the incident that the United States bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade on May 7 1999, when the date of Beijing was May 8 1999 due to the time difference.



had strong influence in both countries (which might be seen through cultural products like films, and the scale of educational contacts), the extent of developing Russo-Chinese ties is still surprising at present.

In the following chapter, the trend and change of the whole history of Sino-Russian non-governmental exchanges will be discussed. By analyzing them, it might be possible for people to discern specific motivations and problems behind the general development of contacts.

### **III. Analysis of trends, changes and problems**

#### **1. Trends and changes**

##### **1.1 scale is expanding, and content is becoming more and more diverse**

In the whole history of Sino-Russian non-governmental exchanges, one clear trend could be that the general scale of contacts has been increasing since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Although this process has met some obstacles, such as the low ebb between 1994 to 2000 and the impact of the 2008 world economic crisis, it still keeps increasing in different ways. One can tell the trend by observing the increasing value of bilateral trade, the number of tourists (either from Russia or China), or the scale of overseas students in both countries. Recently, it seems that the process of expansion might be accelerating, which could be attributed to policies, domestic and international environments.

In addition, the content of exchanges is also becoming more and more diverse, which might be obvious in all the fields of exchange:

In the field of economy, China mainly “exported” low-cost daily necessities to Russia at first (although they might be not so “cheap” in Russia at that time), which could be replaced easily. However, at present, China exports various products, including many electrical, high-technology, and high-quality products to Russia; while Russia provides not only natural resources and raw materials, but also agricultural products to China. The increase of investment is also significant, since the speed of development has been incredible in the last five years.

In the field of education and culture, both Russia and China are discovering new

ways for further development. Aside from exchange students, cooperation between Russian and Chinese higher educational institutions has also begun to develop in different ways.

In the field of tourism, both Russian and Chinese tourists are more and more willing to go deeper into foreign countries. At first, they might only go to close cities (like cities on the Sino-Russian borders) and big cities; but now, you can find them almost everywhere, which can be remote areas like Irkutsk, Crimea, Arctic National Park, Xinjiang, and Hainan, it might be not so surprising to find tourists from China or Russia.

Besides these, the development of new technologies like the internet also gives both countries new ways of contacting, especially for young people in Russia and China.

## **1.2 The change of governments' roles in the process**

As mentioned above, both Russian and Chinese governments occupied vital positions in the whole history of Sino-Russian non-governmental exchanges. With the passage of time and historical periods, roles of governments have changed.

In early times, because both countries lacked experiences of transition from former Socialist system to a new system, the two governments were more like “pathfinders”: they were both envious and cautious in their contacts. On one hand, they came to some agreements for the convenience of contact, including the important joint statement; on the other hand, they could not fully trust each other due to

ideological differences (official ideologies) and conflict of interest (like border issues).

Then, with the development of non-governmental exchanges, some problems appeared. Chinese low-quality products, along with some illegal ways of sales and customs clearance, might leave bad images to Russians; at the same time, Chinese businessmen also were not satisfied with the bad economic and political environment in Russia. Thus, to alleviate these problems, both countries took some actions and made agreements. In this period of time, they played roles as “regulators” --- these policies have been harmful to the development of exchanges at that time, but were necessary for the future.

As time came to the 21th century, both countries entered a new era: China joined WTO in 2001 and began to reform its productive industries; while Vladimir Putin became the president of Russian Federation, trying to change the image of Russia on the international stage and to eliminate domestic corruption. As a result, they began to build further partnership and relations. This process was undertaken in several ways: firstly, they made some official agreements in the field of economy, culture, education, and tourism, encouraging more trading and personnel exchanges across the border; secondly, they decided to host some communicative activities like “the year of culture”(“the year of Russia” in 2006 and “the year of China” in 2007), using the power of officials to stimulate non-governmental exchanges; lastly, more information and news of Russia and China appeared in medias, helping Russian and Chinese people to know more about each other. In this period of time, they are more

like “instructors” or “advocators”.

Recently, with the sharp increase in all the fields of non-governmental contacts, governments’ actions may not be as significant as before in the area of non-governmental exchanges. They might be like parents whose children have grown up, only trying to help them when they have difficulties and need more assistance. Therefore, it can be said that they are like “guardians” for Russian and Chinese people, tourists, and companies.

To summarize, during the entire period after 1991, governments’ roles cannot be ignored. Their roles changed from “pathfinders” to “regulators” due to some initial problems. Then, they changed from “regulators” to “advocators” for further development and did much to protect the benefits of Russian and Chinese people and cooperation during the process of contacts.

### **1.3 The change of Russian people’s attitudes toward Chinese**

One of the most important benefits of non-governmental exchanges is that it can make people know more about each other, which means that it might help people eliminate some misunderstandings and biases through different kinds of contacts.

Although China and the Soviet Union had a short “honeymoon period” in the 1950s, when the Soviet Union provided technical and industrial support to the Republic of China, Russians still worried about Chinese expansion and its population. Khrushchev once explained why he refused the proposal of inviting Chinese laborers to develop Siberia, “Mao talked about assimilation----he wanted that Chinese

emigrate to Siberia, which might be a long-term strategy. It is easy to invite Chinese, but hard to get them to leave. Then, guests would drive away masters, and we might lose Siberia and Vladivostok---it is what assimilation means in Chinese.”<sup>60</sup> These thoughts, which were from the idea of the “yellow peril”, might have been relatively popular in Russia (from the era of Russian Empire to the Russian Federation) for a long time.<sup>61</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, due to the Sino-Soviet split and border disputes, Chinese were generally regarded to be “enemies” and “threats” to the Russian people.

This situation did not change in the first several years after the end of the Cold War. Firstly, many cheap low-quality and fake products were sold to Russians, bringing harm to the Russian domestic market and leaving a bad impression about China among Russians. Many Russians began to hate China and Chinese products---some Russian stores even had banners with words “we do not sell Chinese products.”<sup>62</sup> Besides that, at that time, Russians generally wanted to walk in “western ways”: they might be more favoring of western cultures and people. Lastly, some illegal and uncivilized behaviors of Chinese might also make Russians “disdain” Chinese people and culture.

However, with the development of non-governmental contacts, the general attitude of Russians to Chinese changed gradually. In 2003, 41% and 33% Russian civilians of Far East Federal subjects (oblasts, republics and krais) had negative opinions about Chinese laborers and entrepreneurs, respectively. The figures declined

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<sup>60</sup> Хрущев Н.С. *Время, люди, власть. (Воспоминания) [Time, People, Authority. (Memoirs)]*. Moscow: ИИК "Московские Новости". 1999. p.469.

<sup>61</sup> Янков, Алексей. “Синофобия - Русофобия: Реальность и иллюзии [Sinophobia-Russophobia: the reality and illusions]” *Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniia*, no. 3, 2010, pp. 65–71. p. 66.

<sup>62</sup> Nie, Zuoping, p. 64.

to 28% and 26% in 2017, which might show that Chinese began to be trusted and understood by local Russians.<sup>63</sup>

Besides that, more and more Russians began to see China as one of their partners and friends. According to the results of questionnaires taken by Levada center, in 2014, 77 % Russians had an overall friendly attitude to China, while 46% Russians thought that Russia should develop economic relations with developing countries like China and Brazil (only 15% Russians thought this way in 2006).<sup>64</sup> In addition, the Levada center took a public opinion survey by interviewing more than one thousand Russian adults every year. When asked the question “in your mind, which five countries are friends of Russia”, only 19% Russians answered “China” in 2007; however, 40% chose “China” in 2018, which occupied the second position among all the countries (Belarus is the first).<sup>65</sup>

Finally, many Russians have begun to recognize the question of “Chinese threats” objectively because they have known more about Chinese. According to their observation, Chinese threats to the Far East and Siberia were exaggerated earlier: most Chinese workers in these regions are temporary residents and they tended to come back to China for better opportunities after 2014. China also faced the problem of the aging of population and the lack of laborers, which means that China might try

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<sup>63</sup> Ларин В.Л., Ларина Л.Л. “Китай в общественном мнении жителей Тихоокеанской России (по итогам опроса 2017 г.) [China in public opinion of residents of Pacific Russia (according to the survey in 2017)].” *Образ России в Странах АТР*. 2018.р. 18.

<sup>64</sup> “Отношение россиян к другим странам. [Relations of Russians to other countries]” *Levada Center*. Dec. 08. 2014. Retrieved March 13, 2019.

<https://www.levada.ru/2014/12/08/otnoshenie-rossiyan-k-drugim-stranam-8/>

<sup>65</sup> “Враги и друзья России [Enemies and Friends of Russia].”

*Levada Center*. June. 14. 2018. Retrieved March 13, 2019.

<https://www.levada.ru/2018/06/14/druzya-i-vragi-rossii-3/>

to attract more Chinese from overseas instead of sending workers to foreign countries.

Thus, it might not be necessary to worry about the “Crimean mode”<sup>66</sup> in the Far East

and Siberia.<sup>67</sup>In 2006, only 36% of Russians thought that the strengthening of China

would not threaten Russia; but in 2016, 54% of Russian had this opinion.<sup>68</sup>



Table 1: The strengthening of China will/or not threat the interests of Russia

Data From ФОМ (2015)

To summarize, although many Russian people still have hostile and biased attitudes to Chinese due to historical inertia and cultural differences, most of them have changed their attitudes to China. Over a 28-year period, generally, speaking,

<sup>66</sup> Stalin forced many nations in Crimea left the place and made Russians the dominant nation in Crimea. Thus, in the public vote in 2014, most people in Crimea decided to become a part of the Russian Federation.

<sup>67</sup> Габуев, Александр, Кашин, Василий. “Вооруженная дружба: как Россия и Китай торгуют оружием [Armed Friends: how Russia and China trade weapons].” *Московский Центр Карнеги*. Nov. 02. 2017. Retrieved March 13, 2019. <https://carnegie.ru/2017/11/02/ru-pub-74601>

<sup>68</sup> “Интерес россиян к Китаю: К Азии или к Европе ближе Россия по своим традициям и культуре [Interests of Russians to China: Russia is close to Europe or Asia according its traditions and culture]?” *ФОМ (Fund of Public Opinions)*. May. 07. 2015. Retrieved March 13, 2019. <https://fom.ru/Mir/12150>



Russians became more interested in communicating with Chinese in different ways---from general hostility and fear to amity and friendship. This is huge progress and change.

## **1.4 Summary of trends and changes**

Generally, non-governmental exchanges between Russia and China are on the right track: the scale of exchanges are expanding, the content is becoming more and more diverse. Governments are important during the whole process, but their roles changed in different historical periods of time---from “pathfinders” and “regulators” in early time to “advocators” and “guardians” in the 21th century. As one major benefits of the development of Sino-Russian people-to-people contacts could be the change of Chinese and Russian people’s attitudes toward each other: they had caution and fear at first; but with the change of international environment and the increase of contacts, friendship and trust are built.

So far, all of these changes and trends could be described to be “positive”. However, even at present, there remain many problems in fields of non-governmental contacts, which will be discussed in detail next.

## **2. Problems behind general trends**

### **2.1 The differences between old people and young people**

In general, in both countries, old people have a stronger complex and deeper affinity with each other:

As described above, many Chinese middle-aged and old people are deeply influenced by Russian and Soviet cultures; at the same time, they have enough free time thanks to retirement and financial support from both government and their children. As a result, they have both interests and conditions of travelling in Russia. According to Sputnik news, more than 45% of Chinese tourists in Russia were above 50 years of age in 2017; when asked about the motivation for coming to Russia, many Chinese interviewees expressed their interests in the Soviet past and culture.<sup>69</sup> The main clients of some Russian tourist programs like “Red Routes” are also old Chinese people due to their memories of the Soviet period. The situation might be similar in Russia, when aged people also have more positive evaluations to Chinese according to the survey.<sup>70</sup> Russian old people also occupied the major position among all the Russian tourists in China.<sup>71</sup>

However, the situation might be not so optimistic among young people in both countries. According to the survey conducted by the Foundation of Public Opinions (ФОМ) in 2015 (table 2), 63% of Russian young people (aged between 18 and 30) prefer to go to European countries; in contrast, only 27% of them are more interested to go to China.<sup>72</sup>

Besides that, in new media which young people tend to use, such as the internet

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<sup>69</sup> “E’luosi gengshou zhongguo zhonglaonian youke qinglai 俄罗斯更受中国中老年游客青睐 [Chinese mid-aged and old people prefer to visit Russia].” *Sputnik News*. Jan. 13. 2017. Retrieved March 10, 2019. [http://sputniknews.cn/russia\\_china\\_relations/201701131021602708/](http://sputniknews.cn/russia_china_relations/201701131021602708/)

<sup>70</sup> Ларин В.Л., Ларина Л.Л., p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> Sheng, Haiyan, p. 107

<sup>72</sup> “Интерес россиян к Китаю: К Азии или к Европе ближе Россия по своим традициям и культуре”, <https://fom.ru/Mir/12150>

and social media, Chinese and Russian content is not so significant. In VK, the biggest social media in Russia, the official account of the Chinese embassy only has 756 “followers”. While in Xinlang Weibo, one of the most important social media of China, the Russian embassy has about 200,000 “followers” (in contrast, the US embassy has about 2.4 million “fans” and the Japanese embassy has about 1 million).

Thus, the differences between old people and young people could be a problem in non-governmental exchanges. Although elders generally have positive opinions about Russia (or China), young people in both countries might be not so interested in each other’s culture. Since they are the future of their countries, more efforts should be made by both countries in stimulating youth contacts.

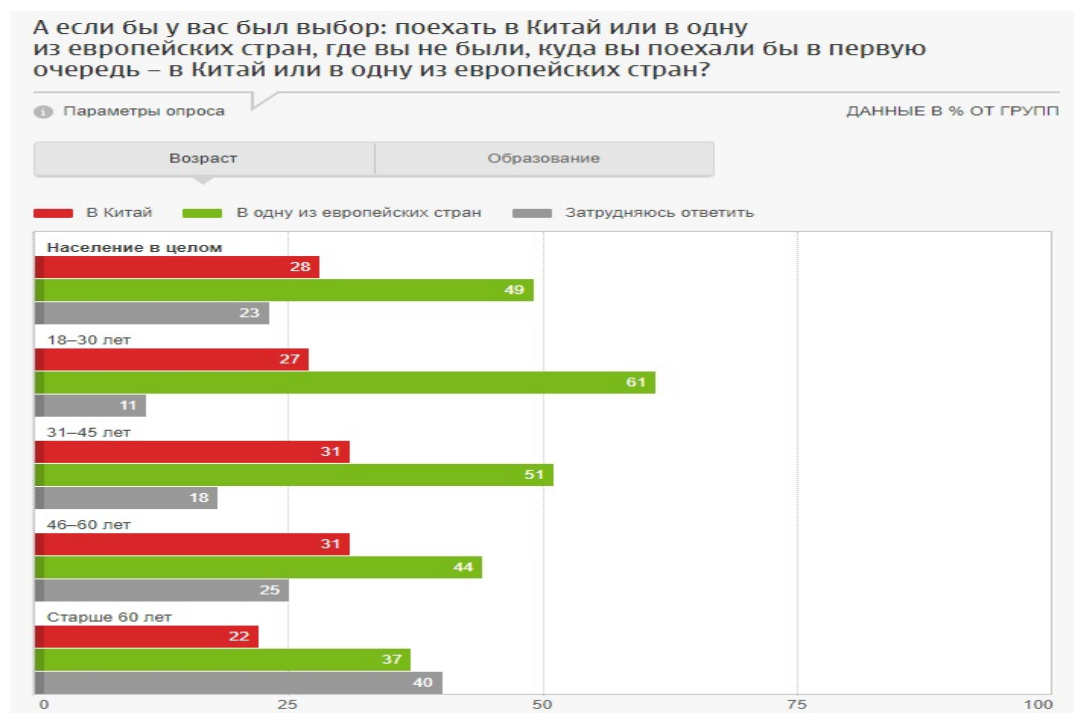


Table 2: If you had a choice: to go to China or to one of the European countries where you hadn’t been, where would you go as the first place – to China or to one of European countries?

## 2.2 The lack of sufficient cultural contacts

Cultural products, such as theatrical plays, films, books, TV dramas, and animations, can be important for foreigners to be interested in different cultures. American films and TV dramas, Japanese animations are very popular in China---they can make people know more about American or Japanese culture and daily life, playing the role of cultural communicative bridges.

Although some achievements have been made in the field of cultural contacts and many artistic groups have performed in Russia (or China), Chinese (or Russian) cultural products might be not so well-known in each other's country. As mentioned above, the influence of Russian and Chinese films could be very limited in China (or Russia). In fact, according to the data provided by The Foundation for Public Opinions (table 3), generally, less than half of Russians ever once had contact with Chinese cultural products (film, book, TV programs). Even among people who received higher education, only 62% of them once contacted with them.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> “Интерес россиян к Китаю: К Азии или к Европе ближе Россия по своим традициям и культуре”, <https://fom.ru/Mir/12150>

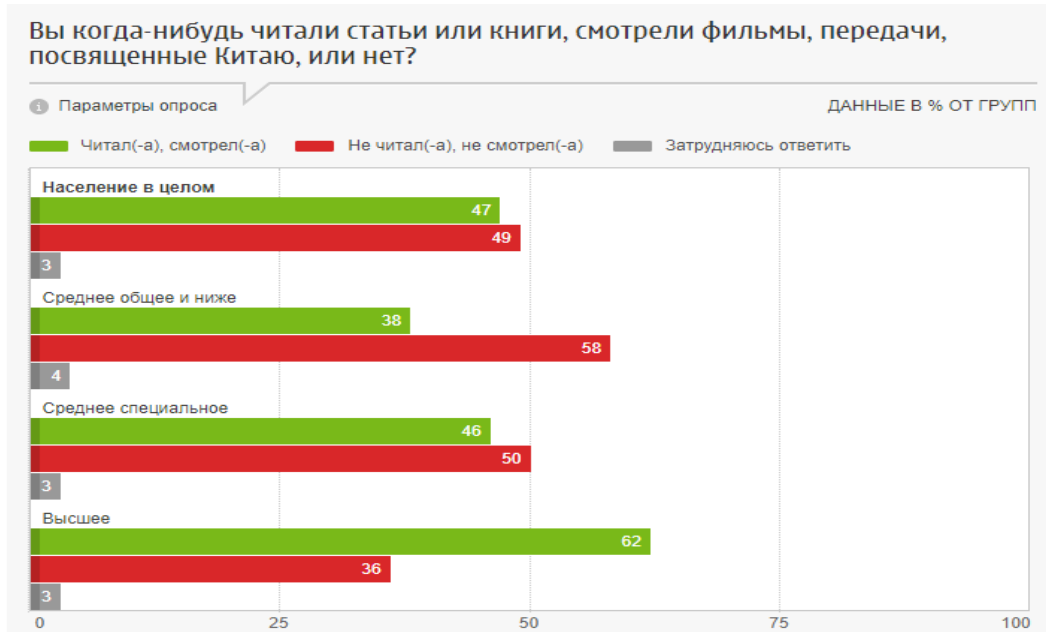


Table 3: Have you ever read articles or books, watched films, programs, dedicated to China or not?

Data From ФОМ (2015)

Among Russians who have ever read Chinese books, most of them might know ancient and classical works, like *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *The Art of War* better; and not many of them even have known modern Chinese books and novels. The situation might be similar in China, where most people only know more about classical and Soviet literature works like *Anna Karenina*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Chameleon*, and *How the Steel Was Tempered* (and many of these works are listed in textbooks and students are required to read them); modern Russian literary works, along with other cultural products, are not popular in China, especially for young people.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Dashuju tushuo zhong'e baiwan qingnian wangshang jiaoliu 大数据图说中俄百万青年网上交流 Big data illustrates Sino-Russian one million young people's communication on the internet. Beijing: Shijie zhishi

Therefore, cultural contacts between Russia and China might not be on such a solid foundation. As a result, people in both countries might have limited ideas about how their Russian (or Chinese) “friends” live---What do they like to read? what do they like to watch? What is the most popular cultural elements and trends in Russia (or China)? Even many Russian or Chinese people may not see the US as their “partner”, but they could know American modern cultural products much more than Chinese or Russian cultures. This problem can be very serious because the lack of sufficient cultural contacts could mean the lack of deep bonds and cultural affinity---it is not helpful for further development.

### **2.3 Summary**

These two problems, “the differences between old people and young people” and “the lack of sufficient cultural contacts” might not be so significant at present, when the general situation of Sino-Russian relations and non-governmental exchanges is in one of the most intense times in their history.

However, it could lead to the conclusion that Russians and Chinese “come together” just for “common practical interests”: China is a fast-developing country with a huge population, Russians can get benefits from its development; Russia has rich natural, scientific, educational, and tourist resources that Chinese might be eager to get. Politically, both countries want to find “partners” and “friends” to relieve their isolation; thus, both governments are also eager to strengthen their relations---as the

basis of bilateral relations, non-governmental contacts can be one important point to break through.

Besides these practical interests, common cultural reorganization and affinity might be lacking between these two countries---they could have limited knowledge about each other's society and popular culture, and they might also not have motivation to further understand them. According to the Foundation for Public Opinions (Table 4), most Russians, especially those who received higher-education, are interested in European cultures, not Chinese culture.<sup>75</sup> This situation is different from Sino-Russian relations in the 1950s, when both language and cultural products were one of the most primary contents of bilateral contacts.

Therefore, these problems can influence the future of Sino-Russian non-governmental exchanges. Before China and the Soviet Union became "enemies", there was a long period of time that was characterized by cultural affinity and influence. That previous time of contacts still can be helpful for developing contacts today in various fields (just think how many Chinese elders are travelling to Russia due to their nostalgia for to the Soviet period). However, compared with European and American culture, the influence of Russian and Chinese culture is quite limited among youth now. Without common cultural affinity and influence, the basis of bilateral relations and contacts can be unstable.

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<sup>75</sup> "Интерес россиян к Китаю: К Азии или к Европе ближе Россия по своим традициям и культуре", <https://fom.ru/Mir/12150>

Если сравнивать, вам больше интересна китайская культура или культура европейских стран?

Параметры опроса ДАННЫЕ В % ОТ ГРУПП

Образование Тип населенного пункта

	Население целом	Среднее общее и ниже	Среднее специальное	Высшее
Больше интересна китайская культура	10	8	10	13
Больше интересна культура европейских стран	29	25	30	<b>36</b>
Одинаково интересна и китайская культура, и культура европейских стран	33	31	32	37
Ни та, ни другая	22	<b>29</b>	23	<u>11</u>
Затрудняюсь ответить	6	8	6	5

Table 4: If you compare, are you more interested in Chinese culture or culture of European countries?

Data from ФОМ (2015)



## **IV. Conclusion and Prediction**

### **1. Recapitulation of contents, trends, and problems**

Since 1991, non-governmental exchanges between Russia and China have been developing rapidly under the efforts of both the governments and the public. In the field of economy, both countries have experienced four periods: despite some difficulties and obstacles, economic contacts developed from early “profiteering” to bilateral trade which have extended into broad fields. In the field of educational and cultural contacts, both Russia and China are discovering new forms of communication and cooperation, which includes international students’ exchanges, creating union universities, exchanges of artistic groups, hosting “year of culture” activities, and other forms of contacts. In the field of tourism, both Russia and China have made numerous efforts to stimulate contacts, including “China Friendly” and “Red Route” projects; as a result, the tourist market in both countries have been developing and extending.

By observing the history in different fields of Sino-Russian non-governmental contacts, some trends can be observed. Firstly, the general scale of non-governmental contacts is expanding, and content is becoming more and more diverse in all the fields, which is a huge achievement. Secondly, governments of both countries play critical but various roles in different historical periods---from “pathfinders” and “regulators” to “advocators” and “guardians”. Lastly, as one major benefit of the strengthening of non-governmental relations, Russians are gradually changing their attitudes to Chinese: at first, they generally thought Chinese as “threats” and

“uncivilized people”; at present, most of them have begun to evaluate Chinese threats objectively, viewing them to be “friends” and “partners”. In spite of some difficulties (like economic crises) and insufficiencies (like the lack of sufficient cultural bonds), generally, both countries, including both governmental officials and ordinary people, are satisfactory and optimistic about the current situation and future of bilateral relations and non-governmental exchanges.

## **2. Predictions**

Based on these above-mentioned facts and analyses, several predictions about the general directions of the future (at least in the next several years) of Sino-Russian non-governmental relations can be made.

### **2.1 Generally, in several years, it will develop more quickly in various areas**

At present, Sino-Russian relations is a current priority for both countries, so it can be predicted that non-governmental exchanges will develop more quickly in the future several years. In fact, since 2014, contacts in several fields have developed at an incredible speed: like total value of bilateral trading values, total amounts of overseas students, and tourist contacts. Governments in both countries have made plans for the future of Sino-Russian relations, and more and more Russian and Chinese people can see the benefits of getting involved in the process of non-governmental contacts.

Besides that, as mentioned above, the Russian public has gradually changed

their attitudes to China and Chinese people. For a long period of time, Chinese students were assaulted by racist groups or people (like skinheads), and Chinese business people were not so welcomed by the Russian public. With the change of general attitudes, these problems could be alleviated in the future. In this case, more Chinese people may be willing to come to Russia as tourists, students, or businessmen. It also can be good news for the future of Sino-Russian non-governmental contacts.

Lastly, to the weakness and problems discussed above, some efforts might be applied to increase cultural influence in both countries. However, it really requires a long time to improve cultural influence and affinity, which means that in the future several years, this situation may not change dramatically.

## **2.2 Russia may become an economic “appendage” of China in the future**

In the history of Sino-Russian contacts, Russia has occupied a predominant position most of the time. The Russian Empire (and the Soviet Union) tried to extend its influence in the backward Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China. When the People’s Republic of China was born, it had to depend on the Soviet support to build its military and heavy industrial system.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia experienced a hard time during the first ten years after independence; while China had not become a super-significant economic power by the end of 2001. At present, the economy of China has entered an era of transition and more Chinese capitals tend to flow to foreign countries like

Russia and Central Asian countries, especially after the birth of the “one belt, one route” strategy; at the same time, Russia has experienced another hard time after 2014, when western sanctions made huge impacts on Russia. This “imbalance” makes more and more Russians begin to worry about Russia becoming China’s economic “appendage” and raw materials provider in the future, which might not be to the economic benefit of Russia.<sup>76</sup>

In addition, in other fields, Chinese influence and power have begun to be more significant in Russia. For example, the number of Chinese visitors in Russia is increasing rapidly in recent years; but the number of Russian visitors in China is not always increasing---in fact, it fluctuates drastically nearly every year.

Thus, due to the imbalance of economic developing trends, along with the adjustment of Chinese economic and diplomatic strategies, China can occupy a more important and dominant position in Sino-Russian contacts.

### **2.3 Western countries still can play roles to influence the process of Sino-Russian contacts.**

As we have seen, most Russians still favor European cultures and do not know much about Chinese culture; while most Chinese might know American, Japanese, or even Korean cultures better than Russian culture. Thus, the cultural bond between Russia and China may be weak.

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<sup>76</sup> Костиков, Вячеслав. “Зачем России дружба с Китаем? [Why Russia build friendship with China]”. *Еженедельник "Аргументы и Факты"*. No. 21. May.24. 2017. Retrieved March 20, 2019. [http://www.aif.ru/politics/opinion/zachem\\_rossii\\_druzhba\\_s\\_kitaem](http://www.aif.ru/politics/opinion/zachem_rossii_druzhba_s_kitaem)

If we regard the relations of China, Russia, and western countries (the US and European countries) to be a big triangle, it can be observed that each time when Russia and China felt threats from western countries led by the United States, they tended to come closer (in the late 1990s and 2014).

Nonetheless, the cultural bond and basis between Russia and western countries are still extremely strong. If Chinese and Russian interests conflict in the future (for example, conflicting interests in Central Asian countries) and western countries try to improve their relations with Russia (although it seems not possible recently), Russia might easily turn to the west again.

The situation might be similar to China. Many Chinese people still remember the history when the Russian Empire annexed former Chinese territories in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; while the younger generation in China may not have similar Soviet or Russian “complex” that their father’s (or grandfather’s) generation might have. In conclusion, the mass base of Russia and Russian influence might be not so strong in China.

Therefore, although the general situation of Sino-Russian contacts (both governmental and non-governmental) is becoming more and more intense and significant, Western countries still can play roles to influence the process of Sino-Russian contacts---because they might have one major advantage: they have a stronger cultural bond with Russia; while they have more cultural influence in China.

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